

MASKIROVKA - A COMPLEX ACTIVITY OF THE KREMLIN AND ITS PROPAGANDISTS, PERFECTED FROM 1917 TILL TODAY

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Abstract: *As we all observe, Europeans and Romanian citizens, today's world is in a state of chaos and geopolitical turbulence unprecedented since the end of the Cold War. The main destabilizing factor in Europe and elsewhere in the world is the Russian Federation, ruled with an iron hand by Dictator Vladimir Vladimirovi Putin, surrounded by a clique of loyalists from the Army, FSB, SVR, GRU and supported by a bunch of oligarchs loyal to the Kremlin.*

There are hundreds of books, studies and articles in which the authors analyze, with credible arguments, the aggressive behavior of the Kremlin. In this context, the book "Russia's war with the world and how it affects us" attracted my attention, author Keir Giles, also published in Romanian by Niculescu Publishing House, in 2023. I think it would be beneficial for Romania if the politicians at the head of the state and military men of all ranks would find time to read (study) it; could find many ways to resist the hostile actions carried out by Russia on a daily basis, including against Romania.

Keywords: *Maskirovka, Russian Federation, Putin, Kremlin, chaos, turbulence, geopolitics, destabilization.*

Introduction

I thought it appropriate to address, in this extremely tense global context, the topic entitled: "**Maskirovka¹ - a complex activity of the Kremlin and its propagandists, perfected from 1917 to the present day**".

The power in Moscow, whatever it was, during the mentioned period, had and has something to do with the entire world, going along the path of the "world communist revolution", that of spheres of influence anywhere on the globe where possible, of the political, economic and military subordination of the so-called "**near abroad**", which Russian leaders see, in a first phase, as far as Berlin and, later, as far as the Atlantic.

To achieve its geopolitical goals, today's Russian Federation, under the dictatorial regime of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, does not hesitate to use any means: economic, financial, military and other, which, of course,

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¹ Wikipedia Free Enciclopedy.

also includes the complex of active measures from the "Maskirovka" concept.

2. What is MASKIROVKA and how does the Kremlin use all destructive means?

According to Wikipedia, Maskirovka is defined as "a Russian military diversion (in rough translation disguise/camouflage/diversion)". The doctrine covers a wide range of measures in the military, political or informational field. Complex and sophisticated methods of camouflaging actions/intentions, denial of actions/intentions and disinformation are used, measures that are executed in wartime as well as in peacetime.

Since the time of the Russian Tsars, from 1700 to 1917, the Russians have thoroughly learned the lessons of history and the teachings of foreign strategists, as follows:

- The example of **the Trojan Horse**, from the 12th century BC;
- The work **The Art of War by Sun Tzu**, from the 5th century BC;
- Other events from the wars that have ravaged the world, and especially Europe, over the last 300 years.

As a result, **the Imperial Russian Army** established a "Military School for the preparation of diversion, since 1904".

Taking from the experience of the Tsarist Empire, the Bolshevik power installed at the end of 1917 took over and developed active concepts and measures to destabilize any state considered an enemy, but also to have total control over states considered "friendly" (from a political, economic, financial, military and informational point of view).

In this context, we must mention that Romania was one of the European countries that had (and still has) to suffer the most from the actions of the USSR and, now, from the Russian Federation, a ferocious dictatorship that wants to restore, step by step, the USSR 2.0.

In order to understand more clearly some of the events planned by the USSR, in its desire for expansion over Europe, but also over some states in the Caucasus and Asia, we could remind those interested:

- **The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact**² (actually Stalin-Hitler), was a non-aggression pact between the USSR and Nazi Germany, signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939 by the head of government and foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov and the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. In the secret annex of the **Pact**, the signatories reach a mafia-style agreement on the division of Europe, with Poland being the most affected, followed by Romania and the Baltic States.

² *Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact*, available at https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pactul_Ribbentrop-Molotov, accessed on 15.09.2024.

What followed?:

- on September 1, 1939, World War II (WWII) begins with the unprovoked attack on Poland by Nazi German troops;

- on September 17, 1939, the USSR attacks Poland from behind (already in great difficulty) under the pretext (of the Maskirovka type) that it is "obliged to defend its Belarusian and Ukrainian population in Poland";

- after the military annihilation of Poland, Nazi and Soviet troops celebrated fraternally with a joint parade, on the demarcation line established by the two aggressors (numerous documents and photographs of the protagonists are available);

- **the two powers proceeded** to mass murders against civilians and military prisoners, as follows: The Red Army and the Soviet NKVD committed the terrible Katyn massacre³, between April 3 and May 9, 1940, 22,500 Polish officers and civilians were killed by shooting in the back of the head (intellectuals, businessmen, etc.). The execution order was issued on March 5, 1940 and was signed by Nikita Khrushchev, who became the General Secretary of the CPSU and the de facto head of the USSR after Stalin's death in 1953. In the case of the massacre, the USSR implemented a complex of disinformation measures and blatant lies, through which it tried to blame the German Army (a case of Maskirovka of all embarrassment). Faced with the existing documents and the evidence found, Mikhail Gorbachev, the first and last president of the USSR, publicly apologized in November 1990. The Russian parliament, more conservative and reluctant, only officially acknowledged on November 26, 2010 that the massacre was committed on Stalin's direct orders (I believe it is one of the most flagrant cases of Maskirovka in the history of the USSR).

Let's get back to the situation today. Every day, the main media vectors in the world, but also in Romania, appear blatant cases of interference, sabotage, various diversions and involvement of the Russian Federation in the lives of target countries (for Putin, everyone is targeted). Those interested could clarify themselves much more precisely by reading the book: "Russia's War with the World and How It Affects Us"⁴, author Keir Giles, also published in Romanian by Niculescu Publishing House, in 2023.

The author has a personal dedication to Putin:

"This book is dedicated to Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, to whom I thank for finally being able to show the whole world that

³The *Katyn Massacre*, available at https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masacrul_de_la_Katy-%C5%84, accessed on 15.09.2024.

⁴ Keir Giles, „Russia's war with the world and how it affects us”, Niculescu Publishing House, 2023.

Russia is still capable of so much evil, while convincing everyone of the need to defend themselves against it."

I will return with some passages from the book mentioned throughout my text.

Let's now review some of the most recent actions in the Maskirovka series of the Kremlin power:

- **It seems that Putin** has become obsessed with influencing the electoral processes in the US, favoring Donald Trump in 2016, by denigrating and cyberattacking the websites of the Democratic Party, but also of other government institutions in the United States.

- **Now Russia is trying**, once again, to influence the elections in the US, by launching "Operation Doppelganger and information laundering"⁵.

- **On September 6, 2024**, we learned that "Revelations bring to light the new Division of the famous GRU unit 29155, which attacks the US and NATO states: "Everything we have seen related to these operations is different"⁶.

- **A title**⁷: "Over a thousand incidents in one day, a sabotage operation orchestrated by Russia and Belarus, thwarted by Polish security services." The aim was to destabilize Poland, says a Pole, Krzysztof Gawkowski: "The saboteurs, operating from Belarus in cooperation with Russia, penetrated local and central government institutions, including state-owned companies implementing military contracts. The foreign services of Belarus and Russia had a specific goal to extort information, blackmail individuals and institutions, and wage a de facto cyber war."

- **Putin's far too active** spokesman, the so-called Peskov, is spouting lies and disinformation almost daily. Here is a recent example (Friday, September 6, 2024)⁸: The Kremlin says it will not help the US decode

⁵ *Cum încearcă Rusia să influențeze alegerile în SUA. Dedesubturile Operațiunii Doppelganger și ale „spălării informației”*, available at <https://hotnews.ro/cum-incearca-rusia-sa-influenteze-alegerile-in-sua-dedesubturile-operatiunii-doppelganger-si-ale-spalarii-informatiei-1785980>, accessed on 15.09.2024.

⁶ *Dezvăluirile ce scot la lumină noua divizie a faimoasei Unități 29155 a GRU, care atacă Ucraina, SUA și statele NATO: „Tot ce am văzut legat de aceste operațiuni e diferit”*, available at <https://hotnews.ro/dezvaluirile-ce-scot-la-lumina-noua-divizie-a-faimoasei-unitati-29155-a-gru-care-ataca-ucraina-sua-si-statele-nato-tot-ce-am-vazut-legat-de-aceste-operatiuni-e-diferit-1785486>, accessed on 15.09.2024.

⁷ *„Peste o mie de incidente într-o zi”. Operațiune de sabotaj orchestrată de Rusia și Belarus, dejucată de serviciile de securitate poloneze*, available at <https://hotnews.ro/peste-o-mie-de-incidente-intr-o-zi-operatiune-de-sabotaj-orchestrata-de-rusia-si-belarus-dejucata-de-serviciile-de-securitate-poloneze-1787157>, accessed on 15.09.2024.

⁸ *Kremlinul anunță că nu va ajuta SUA să decodifice mesajul lui Putin despre Kamala Harris. „Să nu-i privăm de această oportunitate”, spune Peskov*, available at <https://hotnews.ro/kremlinul-anunta-ca-nu-va-ajuta-sua-sa-decodifice-mesajul-lui-putin>

Putin's message about Kamala Harris. Putin said he prefers Kamala Harris because she smiles beautifully. In fact, he wants the exact opposite, to win Donald Trump's friend;

- **Serious incidents generated by Russia**⁹ continue daily. On September 6, 2024, the US announces that "US judicial authorities on Thursday, September 5, charged five agents of the Russian military services (GRU) for their alleged involvement in a cyberattack that targeted government websites in Ukraine, in preparation for the invasion of that country on February 24, 2022". The individuals also attacked 26 NATO partners, including the United States. Romania was also attacked, but our authorities are saying nothing.

- **Since december 31,1999**, when former Russian President Boris Yeltsin left Vladimir Putin (elected president in the summer of 2000) as interim president, the latter assumed the leading role in manipulation, disinformation and outright lies. We must remind potential readers that before his election to his first term as president of the Russian Federation, Putin ordered the FSB (of which he was briefly head) to blow up several apartment blocks near Moscow, killing dozens of his own citizens, including children. Using violent propaganda, he blamed Chechen forces, giving him the pretext to militarily attack Chechnya and raze the capital Grozny. This is how he established himself as a great defender and hero of Russia, increasing his chances of being elected, although before these events he had a very low trust score (see the book "Blowing up Russia" by Alexander Litvinenko).¹⁰ Putin plays this dirty game with a smile on his face, without blinking. Here's a recent example¹¹ of lying: He claims that he never refused to negotiate with Kiev!? He did the same before the annexation of Crimea and after the "little green men" from the GRU completed the job, the men about whom Putin claims he knew nothing.

- **In January and February 2022**, before the invasion, Putin, his henchmen and lie-bearers Maria Zakharova and Dmitry Peskov assured all the inhabitants of Planet Earth that Russian troops (approximately 200,000 people) at that time were peacefully training along the border with Ukraine (in the north in Belarus and in the east of the state that will be invaded on

despre-kamala-harris-sa-nu-i-privam-de-aceasta-oportunitate-spune-peskov-1785684, accessed on 15.09.2024.

⁹ *SUA a pus sub acuzare cinci agenți ruși din serviciul GRU*, available at <https://hotnews.ro/sua-a-pus-sub-acuzare-cinci-agenti-rusi-din-serviciul-gru-recompense-de-10-milioane-pentru-informatii-care-sa-duca-la-arestarea-lor-1785392> , accessed on 15.09.2024.

¹⁰ Alexandr Litvinenko, Iuri Felstinski, „Blowing up Russia”, Gibson Square Books Ltd., UK, 28 november 2019.

¹¹ *Putin susține că nu a refuzat niciodată să negocieze cu Kievul și că o va face*, available at <https://hotnews.ro/putin-sustine-ca-nu-a-refuzat-niciodata-sa-negocieze-cu-kievul-si-ca-o-va-face-care-este-prima-conditie-1784898>, accessed on 15.09.2024.

24.02.2022 by the Soviet-Russian "pacifists"). They were training because they had the right to do whatever they wanted on their own territory. Lucky for the Americans and the British who detected the Dictator's aggressive intentions in advance and warned Zelensky, who could not believe it. The Russians intended, through multiple and complex actions from the "MASKIROVKA" palette, **to achieve total strategic surprise and resolve everything in three days** (by now two and a half years of war have already passed and the end is not in sight);

- **Diversion and disinformation** also target the Russian population, with the aim of getting them to support the war and provide the "cannon fodder" necessary to achieve political and military goals. To this end, the press is subject to severe censorship (as Peskov recently stated) and established propagandists such as Solovyov and Margarita Simonyan and many others support the Kremlin without reservation and often through violent verbal interventions. Here is what Solovyov recently stated¹²: *"He tells the Russians that they have no reason to go to Europe and asks rhetorically, What's there? An aging, poorly educated, poorly brought up population"* (n.a. If we think about it carefully, it's even a characterization of the population of Russia!).

- **The Kremlin is intensively using the Russian Orthodox Church** through its head, Patriarch Kirill, to support the war and to attract young people to the Red Army (n.a. it remained that way) using a fundamentalist Muslim argument, that this is how they will get to Heaven.

At the end of this chapter (although there is much more to say) we must note the blow dealt by the founding members of BRICS – China and Russia who, using a wide range of political, diplomatic, economic, military and informational actions, managed to attract Erdogan's Turkey (still a NATO member) to this competing organization of the "Collective West", which aims to acquire a military component in the near future (!?). It is no coincidence that Turkey's admission to BRICS will take place in October this year, shortly before the presidential elections in the United States. Here, the "unlimited friendship" between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin is also bearing fruit internationally, by moving the center of world power to the Asia-Pacific Region, a fact with major geopolitical consequences. The BRICS members aim to "end" the supremacy of the dollar and, probably, to invent a new currency competing with it.

¹² *Propagandistul Soloviov le spune rușilor că nu au pentru ce să meargă în Europa*, available at <https://hotnews.ro/video-propagandistul-soloviov-le-spune-rusilor-ca-nu-au-pentru-ce-sa-mearga-in-europa-ce-i-acolo-o-populatie-imbatranita-prost-educata-prost-crescuta-1786797>, accessed on 16.09.2024.

3. Some of the most important issues presented by the author of the book "Russia's War with the World and How It Affects Us - Keir Giles"¹³

The book is structured in eight chapters, with an Appendix with interviewed people, a list of recommended readings and several hundred bibliographical notes. In my opinion, the book makes a surgical X-ray of Russia yesterday and today, highlighting the atavistic aggressiveness of this state and the irrepressible desire for new conquests wherever possible!

I believe that those who will read (study thoroughly) the book, especially those among the politicians and military at the top of the Army, will have a lot to learn regarding Russia's policies towards the states of the world and especially towards its neighbors from the "near abroad".

In the preface to the book, the author states: *"In the long period preceding the 2022 attack of the Russian Federation on Ukraine, the conflict between Moscow and the West has been growing more and more. Even those who didn't pay much attention to the country couldn't help but notice how hardly a week went by without Russia once again making headlines, carrying out outrageous actions somewhere around the world. The Kremlin seems to have long since turned activities like shooting down airliners, poisoning dissidents, meddling in elections, spying, and hacking into the norm. And the question repeatedly asked of Russia watchers, myself included, was: What good is all this? Why does Russia consistently behave this way? And what does it achieve?"*¹⁴.

The author states: *„In this book I try to piece together the puzzle to explain how and why the Russian Federation is expanding its sphere of influence wherever it can, even beyond Ukraine – and what the implications are, not just for governments, but for ordinary people. I have brought together accounts from the military, politics, diplomacy, espionage, cyberspace, organised crime and more to show how Moscow is running its global campaigns and how no one is too insignificant to be caught up in them.”* *“...Many of the Russian government's current methods are based on its past experience of manipulating and controlling both its own people and politicians and government officials abroad.”*¹⁵.

Russia's violent actions have intensified since 2014, as follows: "In 2014, Russia sent undercover military intelligence agents to the Czech Republic. Their mission was to attack an ammunition depot containing equipment that was supposed to reach Ukraine. The entire depot blew up,

¹³ Keir Giles, „Russia's war with the world and how it affects us", Niculescu Publishing House, 2023.

¹⁴ Idem, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

killing two Czech citizens. Russia is also the main suspect in a series of similar explosions that occurred around the same time in Bulgaria.”¹⁶.

“Russia’s violent actions in almost all European countries have continued from 2014 to the present day through poisonings, sabotage of transport infrastructure (Germany, France, Poland), cyber attacks and propaganda in favor of extremist parties and groups in the West.”

The author rightly believes that Russia’s attitude today is returning to what was normal in its Soviet past and, even earlier, in Tsarist times. As we will see in the chapters that make up this book, the descriptions of Moscow’s behavior during the Cold War are still valid today (with added aggression and violence). Domestically, Russia intends to rebuild a strong state, “free from moral or legal constraints in the exercise of absolute power.”

Externally, the Russian Federation uses “every imaginable means to destroy the power, stability and unity of the West, regardless of the human suffering caused.”

To understand how things stand, we need to analyze in depth how, under Putin's leadership, the Russian Federation has returned to its historical normality, repression and aggressive dictatorship at home, as well as open conflicts with Western states, whenever it manages to harm them abroad.

It remains to be studied how the Russians helped Trump become president and how he acted in various international cases in favor of Russia. There is talk of his blackmail and a significant financial dependence on Moscow.

It is also alleged that Russia tried to influence the Brexit vote in order to force Britain out of the EU. The operation was also successful with the complicity of many EU officials. It is worth noting that even today, the UK governments have not wanted to investigate Russia's role in Brexit, blaming the huge sums of money of Russian oligarchs, deposited in London banks.

Various Western analysts believe that behind such high-profile examples as Trump and Brexit, there are campaigns to influence and corrupt foreign policies, which are ongoing, including today, despite the cruel reality of the war in Ukraine.

The main methods of manipulating information disseminated by the media in the interests of informational-psychological conflict objectives are¹⁷:

- Outright lies aimed at disinforming both the domestic population and societies abroad;
- Hiding information of critical importance;

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

¹⁷ Dictionary of terms and definitions in the field of information security”, Military Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Army, Moscow, 2008.

- Burying valuable information in a pile of informational garbage;
- Simplification, confirmation and repetition (inoculation);
- Terminological substitution: the use of concepts and terms whose meaning is unclear or has undergone changes, which makes it difficult to fully understand events;
- Introducing the concept of taboo regarding certain types of information or categories of news;
- Image recognition: well-known politicians or celebrities can take part in political actions on command, thus influencing the worldview of their supporters;
- Providing negative information, which is easier for the public to accept than positive information.

From what is presented above, it can be seen that the Soviet-Russian Intelligence Services are working continuously (KGB/FSB, SVR, GRU and others) to destabilize the West in general, as well as any country around the world considered a target by the Kremlin.

According to Alex Younger¹⁸, former head of MI6, "the list of things forbidden for Russian intelligence is very short." This includes ordinary acts of crime abroad. To be targeted by the Russian state leadership is to be the target of one of their assassination campaigns¹⁹. The world-famous cases: the murder of Litvinenko and the attempted assassination of the Skripal family demonstrate the audacity and carelessness of the Russian services.

On the other hand, dozens of assassinations have been committed in Russia on political orders, a notorious case being the shooting of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, killed in 2006, on the very birthday of Dictator Putin.

Observers and analysts from several countries believe that Russia is developing various means of attacking other countries without actually entering into war, but with the aim of exploiting them to the fullest. But this means investing large sums and considerable resources in the development of the armed forces, so that they are well prepared for a war in the true sense of the word²⁰.

An important aspect, in the Kremlin's view, is the use of the Internet and social media/information networks to produce massive and

¹⁸ *UK spy chief says Russia poses 'standing threat' to the west*, available at <https://www.-ft.com/content/fc0d234e-311d-11e9-8744-e7016697f225>, accessed on 16.09.2024.

¹⁹ *From Russia With Blood: 14 Suspected Hits On British Soil That The Government Ignored*, available at <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/heidiblake/from-russia-with-blood-14-suspected-hits-on-british-soil>, accessed on 16.09.2024.

²⁰ *The Russian way of war*, available at <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Hot%20Spots/Documents/Russia/2017-07-The-Russian-Way-of-War-Grau-Bartles.pdf>, accessed on 16.09.2024.

violent disinformation against all citizens and institutions in the target countries, that is, against the entire world. The means of protection of NATO/EU member states in this case are extremely weak and lagging behind the new methods and technologies of the aggressor.

As we have all been convinced (those interested in Russia's "destructive policies"), when Moscow was caught red-handed, its reaction was compared to the five stages of suffering: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance²¹. **Denial** is accompanied by the need for evidence. **Anger** involves an avalanche of counter-accusations. **Negotiation** revolves around unrelated examples to justify that the Russian Federation is no worse than other states. **The depression phase** presents Russia as a victim of an external conspiracy, which intends to weaken or destroy it. And finally, in **the acceptance phase**, the Russian Federation puts aside pretense and proudly celebrates its achievements.

At each of these stages, the Kremlin has a credibility problem, which is not exactly a problem. After systematically lying about Crimea, Ukraine, flight MH17, Syria, the Skripals, the invasion of Ukraine, its own history (adapted every month to Putin's political interests), and many other subjects, Russia has diminished its plausibility to the point where now, if it denies something, even if it is sincere, it is no longer believed.

It is worth noting that the Russian Federation has a wide range of methods by which it can recruit or persuade individuals from abroad to plot against their own countries. The targeted states are not always able to clearly observe this process, as, often, the links are not direct ones with a branch of the Russian government, but with a commercial organization that is, in theory, independent. But, given that so many Russian companies are either directly or indirectly controlled by the state, or have connections to intelligence services or organized crime, any information that "it's just a business" must be evaluated carefully.

The three sectors in Russia, business, crime, and the state, have overlapping goals and histories, and rather than directly opposing each other as in Western countries based on the rule of law, security agents and criminals often work closely together.

One of the clearest examples of how Russia's power tools exploit the interdependence between business, state, and crime is the Night Wolves Motorcycle Club, a rather strange organization that resembles a gang of

²¹ *The Five Stages of Arguing with a Russian Nationalist*, available at <https://imgur.com/gallery/five-stages-of-arguing-with-russian-nationalist-0HagQ>, accessed on 16.09.2024.

outlaw bikers but is actually a multinational corporation operating on behalf of the Russian state to extend its influence and control around the world.²².

4. What should be done from the Romanian perspective:

- **Romanian politicians**, the military, the intelligence services, all institutions of the Romanian state and citizens should understand who we are dealing with;

- **Russia** is and will be a threat to the European member states of NATO and/or the EU, and from this comes the urgent need for resilience on all levels: political, economic, military, informational, cyber, etc.;

- **Urgent review and update** of the legislation on defense and related areas (economy, finance, energy and transport infrastructure, etc.). The slowness with which the Parliament and the Government work is a major risk factor;

- **Strengthening the Army** and the intelligence services to face any risks and threats, from those of hybrid warfare to a possible total war. Strengthening the Army does not only mean armaments, but also people ready for combat, at a minimum level of 120,000 active military personnel and at least 500,000 reservists. At this point, the example of Poland and Finland can be followed;

- **Firm measures** to end the national division (Russia is largely to blame, through its agents of influence, through spies infiltrated into institutions and through the numerous “useful idiots” who manifest themselves violently in the media);

- **Cessation of violent and unjustified attacks against the Army** as a fundamental institution of the Romanian State, and of those targeting active, reserve or retired military personnel. The worst thing is that individuals in politics, former and current, attack the military by shamelessly lying about due legal rights. The legitimate question arises, what interests do they serve and do they even care about the stability of Romania?

As for me, I don't have high hopes that anything will be achieved, given the political and institutional mess in Romania, but, for someone who has been studying the russians since 1955, i'm trying to sound an alarm.

²² Katarzyna Chawryło, *Russian nationalists on the Kremlin's policy in Ukraine*, available at <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-12-29/russian-nationalists-kremlins-policy-ukraine>, accessed on 16.09.2024.



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